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## **Role Of Phonetics In Forming The Communicative Competence Of Foreign Russianist Students**

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### **Abstract**

The article is concerned with the issues of teaching foreign Russianist students the Russian phonetics with due regard to their language proficiency (from elementary to advanced levels). Foreign students learning the Russian language complete different tasks in the field of pronunciation, rhythmic patterns and intonation. However, courses on the Russian phonetics mainly aim at teaching students to communicate in a foreign language, i.e. to form their communicative competence.

**Keywords:** teaching phonetics; Russian as a foreign language; communicative competence.

## **Papel De La Fonética En La Formación De La Competencia Comunicativa De Los Estudiantes Rusos Extranjeros**

### Resume

El artículo se refiere a los problemas de enseñar a los estudiantes rusos extranjeros la fonética rusa con el debido respeto a su dominio del idioma (desde los niveles elemental hasta avanzado). Los estudiantes extranjeros que aprenden el idioma ruso completan diferentes tareas en el campo de la pronunciación, los patrones rítmicos y la entonación. Sin embargo, los cursos sobre fonética rusa apuntan principalmente a enseñar a los estudiantes a comunicarse en un idioma extranjero, es decir, a formar su competencia comunicativa.

Palabras clave: enseñanza de fonética; Ruso como lengua extranjera; competencia comunicativa.

### 1. Introduction

“The basis of communication is phonation since any language originally exists in oral form. Therefore, speech and, in particular, its phonetic aspect should be crucial in the process of teaching a new language, in our case Russian as a foreign language” (Shustikova, 2010: P. 9). The practical Russian language course for foreign students aims at forming communicative competence, which allows solving “communication problems in everyday, educational, industrial and cultural life relevant for students by means of a foreign language; the student’s ability to use facts of language and speech to realize certain goals of communication” (Azimov, Shchukin, 2009: P. 98). To form communicative competence, foreign students should develop the ability to communicate in a foreign language with due regard to the general literary norms that are understood by all native speakers. Therefore, the main objective of learning Russian as a foreign language is to master different language norms: orthoepic, spelling, lexical, morphological and syntactic. We define the term “language norm” as “a set of phenomena permitted by language system, selected and fixed in the speech of native speakers, which are absolutely mandatory for all speakers of this language” (Verbitskaya, 1977: P. 15).

Special attention should be paid to teaching the phonetics of the Russian literary language, which is not included in any course of Russian as a for-

eign language. Mispronunciation disrupts communication and often causes the rejection of foreign speech and irritation. According to T. Shustikova, “the need to comply with norms of oral speech is conditioned not only by communicative but also by aesthetic factors” (Shustikova, 2010: P. 153). Inaccurate pronunciation can reveal the insufficient cultural level of speakers or indicate a foreign speaker who does not know the pronunciation standards of the Russian language.

## 2. Methods

There are two methods of teaching phonetics, including imitative and conscious (analytic-imitative). As a part of the imitative method, students should listen to some sound and then reproduce it. In this case, the teacher’s role is reduced either to pronouncing the sample or to playing the corresponding record. Foreign students should hear any given sound correctly. However, adults cannot always perceive foreign speech in a proper way. Their own hearing fools them since it complies with the system of their native language. When teachers give a “listen” task, they should know that foreign students need to be prepared for this. These facts uncover a serious drawback of the imitative method: the educational outcome is entirely dependent on the student’s phonetic abilities. Children have good imitative abilities but most people lose them with aging. Therefore, imitation has an auxiliary role in practicing pronunciation.

The main method of teaching pronunciation is the analytical-imitative method. It utilizes the principle of consciousness: the assimilation of language materials should be based on its understanding. Foreign students should learn what and how to pronounce any given sound correctly and only then pronounce it. In other words, the studied phonetic phenomenon is subject to preliminary analysis. Therefore, teachers start with explaining educational material, using tables and schemes for articulating sounds. They also provide a sound sample. After explanation and demonstration, students try pronouncing it in the right way. The name of the method (analytical-imitative) reflects its essence: it combines analysis (the moment of consciousness) and imitation. Thus, techniques for teaching pronunciation emphasize that simulation preceded by analysis is more effective because it becomes conscious.

## 3. Main body

Teaching the phonetics of any foreign language starts with an introductory phonetic course. Its objective is to develop the student’s listening and

speaking skills and to present basic features of the Russian phonetic system. At this stage, teachers focus on each aspect of aural-oral skills (acoustic and articulatory). Working on the acoustic aspect, teachers develop the student's listening, i.e. teach them to hear Russian sounds correctly (to recognize and distinguish them), to distinguish words with different stresses and sentences with different intonations by ear. While developing the articulatory aspect, teachers improve Russian sounds, instruct how to pronounce words with the correct rhythm and reproduce the main types of intonation structures. Although an introductory phonetic course lasts for a minimum period of time (7-14 days), phonetic materials should be presented in full and reflect the phonetic system of the Russian language. Therefore, the main principle of selecting materials for the elementary level is compliance with the phonetic system of the language. If the voiceless consonant [т] is introduced, then it will be necessary to introduce such sounds as [д], [т'], [д'], i.e. the main paired consonants. The teaching material presented in an introductory phonetic course should contain the following: all sounds and their oppositions (vowels-consonants, voiced-voiceless, hard-soft); stress and the rhythmic models of monosyllabic, two-syllable and three-syllable words; unstressed vowels after hard and soft consonants; assimilative processes of devocalization-vocalization; four types of prosodies (according to the methodical system of teaching intonation developed by E.A. Bryzgunova, (Verbitskaya, 1977) which distinguishes between sentences of different communicative types). This phonetic material constitutes the basic Russian phonetics, whose study is mandatory in any introductory phonetic course regardless of the student's nationality. The introduction of educational material may differ depending on the native language of students or regardless of it. The most efficient courses consider phonetic systems of Russian and the student's mother tongue. Such comparison determines which material will be easy to learn in a given language group and which will be difficult. During the first lessons, students get simple materials and learn to recognize the muscular sensations that arise when pronouncing certain sounds, as well as observe different positions of their lips, tongue, etc. Students train their speech organs, learn to move their tongue and lips in a new and unusual manner. Further lessons involve phonetic materials that are more difficult to master for a given nationality.

Teaching vocabulary and grammar at an introductory phonetic course mostly aims at forming one's pronunciation. Therefore, a new word can be introduced only when students are able to pronounce all the sounds that

make up this word and have learned its appropriate rhythmic model. The meanings of new words are most often semanticized using means of visualization, while grammatical material is acquired lexically without special explanation.

Much attention should be paid to spoken language at the initial educational stage: students answer questions and ask their own, as well as make short statements based on a given picture or situation. At the same time, they learn to read and write in Russian. This means that the work on educational material should be as follows: first, students should hear a new sound, word or utterance; second, they pronounce these units themselves; third, they see these lexical units written in a book or on a blackboard; finally, students learn to read and write the given units. Thus, foreign students are taught based on the aural-oral method.

After an introductory phonetic course, students begin an in-depth study of lexical and grammatical material while mastering different types of speech activity, including listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, their aural-oral skills are not fully formed, therefore practical courses on Russian are accompanied by phonetic lessons. This organization should make it easier for foreign students to work on vocabulary and grammar, prepare each new portion of lexical and grammatical material and address phonetic difficulties (Shchukin., 2003). This auxiliary training is conducted in the form of phonetic exercises which take 5-10 minutes in each lesson. Phonetic exercises are given at the beginning of a lesson as they help adjust the auditory and vocal apparatus of students to the Russian pronunciation and switch it to a foreign language. If textbooks do not contain such exercises, teachers should prepare their own material for pronunciation warm-up.

The biggest challenge is to “reduce” accent. The successful work on pronunciation is determined by the thorough selection of educational material, its organization in a system that ensures effective learning, as well as the consideration of the native language of foreign students. At the advanced stage of learning Russian as a foreign language, students will need a course in corrective phonetics of the Russian language. It is significant for students who have studied Russian in their own country and then came to Russia to complete their education or obtain advanced training. The above-mentioned course is crucial for foreign Russianist students, future teachers and translators. The speech of foreigners acquiring these professions should be close to the speech of native speakers; therefore, many characteristics of their native language are taken into account. There are plenty of textbooks on phonetics considering the native language of students. Thus,

O.N. Korotkova developed and published a number of such textbooks, in particular “Speaking Russian without an accent” for the Koreans and Chinese (Korotkova, 2010, 2015) courses in corrective phonetics with special components for the Bulgarians, Hungarians, Germans, Poles and Czechs (Averbakh, 1981. Skvortsova, 1981. Drakhlis, 1980. Anpilogova, 1980. Bash, 1981)

Many Russian sounds can be taught and learned during an introductory phonetic course but their proper pronunciation is not automated and is heavily influenced by native pronunciation. It is especially difficult to pronounce sounds that are similar to the Russian sounds or are absent in one’s native language. This applies to hard and soft consonants in the Russian language since this category is not present in most foreign languages. Many difficulties arise when students need to pronounce consonants that are always hard [ж, ш, ц] or always soft [ч’, ш’, й]. Special attention should be paid to dorsal Russian consonants represented in the class of labial, mediolingual and backlingual. This articulation feature is also typical of all forelingual consonants, except for [ш, ж, л, р] that are cacuminal. At the same time, apical consonants are common to many other languages (Lebedeva, 1986).

The opposition of Russian voiced and voiceless consonants causes certain difficulties for foreign students because Russian voiced consonants are characterized by the presence of voice throughout their articulation and are opposed not only to voiceless consonants but also to semi-voiced consonants. Such characteristics as tenseness/laxness and aspiration/lack of aspiration accompany voiceless and voiced consonants and do not affect their distinctive features (Antonova, 1988). It is also worth paying attention to the position of voicing/devoicing, improving the pronunciation of voiceless consonants at the end of the word and before another voiceless consonant, as well as explaining the voicing of voiceless consonants preceding voiced ones, except for consonants [л, р, м, н, в], and solving this difficulty.

It is a common problem of foreign students to correctly pronounce combinations of several consonants because their native language has only some of such combinations or no consonant combinations at all (for example, Chinese). In these cases, students insert an additional vowel and increase the number of syllables in a word: встреча [высытр’эч’а]. In addition, they can pronounce all consonants in combinations where their sounds are unpronounceable: [ч’увствъ, с’эрдцъ]. It is difficult for foreign students to understand assimilative processes in the Russian phonetics. They

pronounce each sound because they do not know that they merge together or assimilate to the others: детский [д'эцк'ий], отчёт [ач:о'т], сжать [ж:ат'], песня[п'эс'н'ъ].

As for vowels, courses in corrective phonetics should focus on the rhythmic organization of words, their stress and vowel reduction depending on the environment and position in relation to a stressed syllable. In Russian, there are two positions of vowel reduction: the first syllable before the stressed syllable, the absolute beginning of the word and other unstressed syllables where reduction will be stronger after hard and soft consonants: дома [дама'], огород [агаро'т], молодой [м'ялодо'й], завтракать [за'фтр'ькът'], часы [ч'исы'], переход [п'ьр'ихо'т]. Unfortunately, these pronunciation norms of the Russian language are not practiced at foreign universities. Even students with the B1-B2 Russian level continue to speak and read as they write. Due to the Russian movable stress, different combinations of stressed and unstressed syllables in a word create a wide variety of rhythmic patterns. The above-mentioned facts mean that rhythmic patterns of words should be acquired "as defined clichés that realize the articulation program of a word" (Antonova, 1988: P. 18).

The smallest unit of organizing and dividing speech is a syntagma since the pronunciation of a single word in communication is a rare phenomenon. L.V. Shcherba defined a syntagma as "the completeness of the meaning of rhythmic groups of words in a sentence" (Shcherba, 1958: P. 86). The biggest challenge is to divide sentences into syntagmas for tonal languages (Vietnamese, Chinese). Speakers of such languages tend to pronounce each word separately without combining them into syntagmas or pronouncing them with a specific pattern (intonation). Foreign students who do not know the basic syntactic structure of some language artificially divide sentences and combine words into groups that are not grammatically related.

The phonetic unity of a syntagma is ensured primarily by intonation and syntagmatic stress that highlight one of the words and combines them all into a single phonetic formation. Intonation fulfills different functions in speech, one of the most important is communicative. Intonation also expresses the subject's attitude to some utterance (feelings, evaluations, etc.). Teaching intonation is the most difficult aspect of teaching foreigners the Russian language. Intonation is the emotional-logical basis of speech. There can be no sentence or speech without intonation. A foreign student faces great difficulties in studying Russian intonation. It is mainly caused by the inextricable connection between the intonation of some utterance



and the person's thoughts, intentions and feelings. In addition, intonation is a rather difficult phenomenon to study since it represents a combination of such elements as a changing pitch (melody), rhythm, the relative duration of individual sounds, their timbre and the sound of syntagmas depending on their lexical variety (Shcherba, 1974: P. 158).

The main method of practicing intonation at the advanced level is the communicative analysis of any given utterance since "its meaning is the result of interacting meanings expressed by the syntactic structure, lexical composition, intonation and the semantic interaction of the above-mentioned utterance with the following or previous ones" (Bryzgunova, 1979). The communicative analysis of text is based on the following principles: 1) the basic unit of teaching is a sentence (utterance); 2) the analyzed utterance is commented in conformity with all its components: syntactic construction, intonation, semantic connections with context; 3) the utterance is considered in the dynamic aspect with due regard to possible situation-determined lexical, grammatical and intonational transformations, as well as semantic and emotional-stylistic shades of meaning; 4) the ultimate goal of working on the utterance is its active assimilation into the unity of lexical, grammatical and intonational patterns. This analysis of the utterance turns the work on intonation into the development of speech, which is the ultimate goal of teaching foreign students the Russian language (Mukhanov, 1989). The greatest difficulty for foreign students is to master the intonation of live communication because semantic and expressive aspects of intonation are closely connected. Native speakers use intonation intuitively. They do not think how to express joy or anger, displeasure, perseverance or request. At the same time, it is very challenging for foreigners to get a Russian joke, irony, disappointment, distrust, doubt, etc. At the advanced stage, it is necessary to teach foreign students to express these intentions using intonation and IP-4, IP-5, IP-6, IP-7 (intonation patterns) in different situations of speech. We have developed textbooks that will help foreign students understand the meaning of dialogues and monologues, teach them to read and speak correctly in different situations of life (Shutova, 2015. Shutova, 2017).

Another aspect of Russian as a foreign language, which teachers consider and practice with a foreign audience, is its stress.

The process of mastering the Russian stress by foreign students contains both phonetic and phonological difficulties, as well as difficulties in mastering the morphological paradigm, types of word formation and groups of words subject to certain accent patterns. According to G.M. Bogomazov,

it is necessary to show students that “stress is a characteristic typical of a whole class of words, i.e. they should get familiar with stress through the assimilation of basic rhythmic patterns” ( Bogomazov, 1981: P. 31). If students learn the “rhythmic impulse” of some model at the initial level of learning the rhythm of Russian words, they learn to use this “rhythmic impulse” and turn more complex and heterogeneous sound sequences into words in accordance with norms of the Russian literary pronunciation at the advanced level of learning.

The work on stress at the advanced level aims at overcoming the deviations manifested in the non-distinction of grammatical forms (‘окна – окн’а), violation of generally accepted norms of the Russian literary pronunciation (област’ей, not ‘областей). Special attention should be paid to overcoming differential deviations (дорог’а – дор’ога, в’ыходть – выход’ить, etc.). This morphological aspect should be taught with due regard to the systematization of educational material according to the main grammatical classes of words: noun, adjective, verb, verb forms. Rather than memorize the stress of each word, it is necessary to highlight the most productive forms of word formation and inflection. Based on our experience, we propose to classify educational material on accentology as follows: a) fixed stress (on the inflection, a suffix, the syllable preceding a suffix); b) stress shifts (from the stem to the inflection and vice versa) (Shutova, 2017)..

Teaching Russian stress is quite laborious and requires great perseverance both from the teacher and from the student since the skills of one’s native language are quite stable. Therefore, the method of presenting educational material is no less important because accent is “compensated” by speech redundancy in the language environment, i.e. speakers with an accent have the impression that their speech act has the absolute effectiveness in terms of its impact on the interlocutor. Such moments reinforce the satisfaction of foreign students because they are still understood and perceived as equal in a communicative situation. Therefore, foreign students lose the incentive to learn language in general and its proper pronunciation, in particular. To avoid the psychological inhibition of aural-oral skills, a course in corrective phonetics of the Russian language and, in particular, its accentological aspect should present the necessary educational material in a different way. We believe the best option is to use the psychological theory of the gradual formation of mental actions and concepts developed by P.Ya. Galperin. It is based on a comprehensive and generalized reference system for organizing stage-by-stage learning according to a strictly fixed plan of actions, which ensures that students do not make mistakes (Galperin,

1966). Such a model, or method of presenting educational material, should be rationally complied with the structure of learning activity. The learning process is the formation of new actions and the corresponding sensory images and concepts. The course of this formation can be represented as a two-stage process, including the stage of preliminary understanding and the stage of mastering the system of guidelines and actions based on them. This set of guidelines is as follows: 1) an object model and 2) an action model (a certain algorithm of its operations). A finished model is not a means of analysis. The model becomes a means that forms knowledge only through its construction, during which, inner laws are revealed (the explanatory function). When students construct models they memorize theoretical rules that can be used as a means of analysis.

#### 4. Conclusion

Thus, a new action with educational material is assimilated through the following stages 1) creating a motivational basis for such actions; 2) drawing a scheme of approximate bases for such actions; 3) the material or materialized stage; 4) the stage of loud speech; 5) the stage of external speech “to oneself”; 6) the stage of hidden speech that eventually becomes a conscious mental action. As a result, there is a generalized, completely minimized and mastered action, which gets automated as exercises are completed and becomes a full-fledged skill (Shutova, 2004). In 2016, the publishing house “Russkii yazyk. Kursy” (“Russian language. Courses”) issued the 2nd edition of our manual on teaching Russian stress that is based on the psychological theory of the gradual formation of mental actions and concepts and provides keys to exercises that allow foreign students to learn the Russian prosody on their own (Shutova, 2016).

Thus, students who have mastered the pronunciation of a foreign language (in particular, Russian as a foreign language) take the first and main step to form their communicative competence, which helps solve the communication tasks relevant for students using the above-mentioned foreign language.

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